Southern Gold Society
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Newsletter

Dahlonega's Parks Clothing Store

By David Crenshaw

"Eureka!"

GOLD.—A gentleman of the first respectability in Habersham County writes us thus under date of 22d July: "Two gold mines have just been discovered in this county, and preparations are making to bring these hidden treasures of the earth to use." So it appears that what we long anticipated has come to pass at last, namely, that the gold region of North and South Carolina would be found to extend into Georgia.

So read the *Georgia Journal* on August 1, 1829. While that early notice ignited public awareness, most Georgians know the deeper story, that Benjamin Parks, a Lumpkin County native, is credited with discovering gold in Georgia. The tale goes that in 1828, while hunting deer near the Chestatee River, Parks literally struck gold by kicking up a stone that turned out to be auriferous.

As collectors of coins from the Southern branch mints—especially the legendary Dahlonega Mint—we know that this spark ignited the first major U.S. gold rush and led to the establishment of Dahlonega as a gold boomtown. Prospectors flooded the region, and the federal government responded by opening the Dahlonega Mint in 1838, producing some of the most collectible coinage in U.S. history until it closed in 1861.

But while the Parks family legacy in Dahlonega may have begun with gold, it didn't end there.

From Gold Dust to Retail Threads: The Legacy of Woodrow Parks

Woodrow Parks, the great-grandson of Benjamin Parks, was born in Lumpkin County on May 19, 1913. For nearly a century, Woodrow's life reflected the values of the people that shaped North Georgia—grit, community, and a deep-rooted love for the land and community of Dahlonega.

In 1928, his father, Harvey Franklin Parks, opened a general merchandise store

in downtown Dahlonega. Then-15-year-old Woodrow started working there delivering groceries—often in a one-horse wagon—earning real-world experience that would later serve him well.

World War II called Woodrow away, and he proudly served more than three years in the U.S. Army Air Forces. As a supply sergeant with the 325th Fighter Group, the famed “Checkertail Clan,” he saw action across North Africa, France, and Italy. His wartime duties included managing a post exchange for 1,000 troops in Connecticut and supplying bomber pilots on their way to D-Day missions. Among his commendations were five Bronze Stars.

After his honorable discharge in March 1945, Woodrow returned home. With his mother Sallie, he converted the general store into Parks Clothing Store, focusing on women’s apparel. The store officially reopened in late 1945, and Woodrow threw himself into retail with the same tenacity he had shown in the military. He later expanded his enterprise with a second store in Ellijay, Georgia.

A Fixture of the Dahlonega Square

Parks Clothing Store quickly became a mainstay in downtown Dahlonega, occupying the Jeremiah Payne House, built in 1855 and one of the oldest commercial buildings in the city. For over six decades the store operated from this location, just steps from the original Dahlonega Mint site—linking past and present in the heart of Georgia’s gold country.

But time, like history, is not always preserved.

The Jeremiah Payne House where the store was located—later referred to as the Parks Clothing building—was the second-oldest surviving structure in the historic district. It withstood the Civil War, a massive hotel fire in 1904, and generations of change in the town. Yet in early 2016, the Dahlonega City Council approved a controversial demolition request despite the opposition of both the Historic Preservation Committee and a vocal citizens group called Preserve Historic Dahlonega. Though many residents and preservationists saw the building as a cornerstone of Dahlonega’s historic character, others viewed it as a liability—unsafe and no longer viable for modern use. City officials cited the deteriorating condition of the building as justification for the demolition.

In its place now stands a Holiday Inn Express & Suites, which opened in December 2020 on the former site of both the Parks Clothing and Butler

buildings. With its modern appearance, the hotel's presence is a stark reminder of the tensions between historic preservation and commercial development in heritage-rich communities like Dahlonega.

For collectors of Dahlonega Mint coinage and students of North Georgia history, the loss of the Parks building marked the physical end of a structure that witnessed the post-Gold Rush evolution of the town—from boomtown to boutique tourism destination. Yet, the story of Woodrow Parks and his beloved store continues to echo in the memories of locals and the hearts of those who treasure Dahlonega's rich past.

Final Curtain Call for a Legend
Woodrow Parks passed away on July 2, 2012, at the age of 99.

His store stood as a bridge between Dahlonega's 19th-century roots and its 21st-century renaissance—a fitting legacy for a man descended from the prospector who helped put Dahlonega on the map.

For coin collectors who walk the square in search of the ghost of Dahlonega's Mint, remember to look a little farther—at the people and stories who continued to keep the town's spirit alive after the closing of the Mint's doors. Parks Clothing Store is part of that heritage, and Woodrow Parks was its heart.

David Crenshaw (left) with Woodrow Parks (right) on the Dahlonega Square in front of Parks Clothing Store, 2006. At age 93, Woodrow was still welcoming customers to the store founded by his father in 1928. The historic building, once

called the Jeremiah Payne House, stood as a local landmark until its demolition in 2016.

Sources:

Digital Library of Georgia. *The Georgia Journal*, August 1, 1829, Image 3. Georgia Historic Newspapers. University of Georgia. https://gahistoricnewspapers.galileo.usg.edu/lccn/sn82014251/1829-08-01/ed-1/seq-3/.

David Crenshaw, “Dahlonega’s Parks Clothing Store,” *Metropolitan Coin Club of Atlanta Newsletter*, Vol. 42, No. 11, November 2006.

Harris Blackwood, “At 95, Dahlonega Clothing Shop Owner Not Ready to Retire,” *Gainesville Times*, January 31, 2009.

Joshua Silavent, “Days Could Be Numbered for Historic Dahlonega Building: City Council Approves Demolition Request,” *Gainesville Times*, February 2, 2016.

Rare 1830 Templeton Reid Gold Coin Headlines Stack’s Bowers Auction

The Southern Gold Society is thrilled to share news of an extraordinary opportunity for collectors of Territorial gold coins. Stack’s Bowers Galleries has announced the upcoming auctions of selections from the renowned James A. Stack, Sr. Collection, featuring 28 Territorial gold coins, many with provenances tracing back to numismatic auctions from the 1910s through the 1940s. This remarkable offering includes a standout piece: the 1830 Templeton Reid $2.50 gold piece, a rare and historic example of the first private coinage struck from native gold in the United States.

The 1830 Templeton Reid $2.50 gold piece, graded PCGS AU-58 CAC CMQ, is a cornerstone of this collection. Last seen publicly in Henry Chapman’s 1924

sale of the Arthur Nygren Collection, this coin represents a pivotal moment in American numismatic history. Templeton Reid, a Georgia assayer, produced these coins during the early days of the Southern gold rush, making them a tangible link to the pioneering spirit of the era. Graded highly and certified by both CAC and CMQ, this piece is a must-see for collectors of Southern and Territorial gold.

Half of the Territorial coins in this offering hail from the collection of Hillyer Ryder, a numismatist better known for his work in colonial coinage but whose world-class assemblage of U.S. Federal and Territorial gold is equally impressive. These coins, unseen on the market for decades, offer a rare chance to acquire pieces with impeccable pedigrees and historical significance.

The James A. Stack, Sr. Collection, valued at over $20 million, is one of the most significant U.S. coin collections ever assembled. Stack's Territorial gold holdings, including the Templeton Reid piece, will be showcased in two upcoming auctions by Stack's Bowers Galleries, scheduled for December 2025 and February 2026 at their Griffin Studios in Costa Mesa, California. Highlights of the collection, including freshly graded coins by PCGS, will be revealed in the lead-up to the August 2025 American Numismatic Association's World's Fair of Money in Oklahoma City, where collectors can view a more complete display at the Stack's Bowers Galleries booth.

For Southern Gold Society members and Territorial gold enthusiasts, this auction represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to acquire rarities like the 1830 Templeton Reid $2.50 gold piece. Stay tuned for updates from Stack's Bowers Galleries via their e-blasts, social media accounts (Instagram, Facebook, TikTok), and at www.stacksbowers.com.

Writers Needed

One of the purposes of the SGS is to "enjoy each member's knowledge." This newsletter is one of the ways this numismatic knowledge is dispersed. The frequency of the newsletter is driven by the number of submissions for publication. The editor of the SGS eNewsletter needs new material and welcomes the opportunity to review your original article for publication. Articles should be relevant to the study of the gold coins and related history of the Dahlonega, Charlotte, and New Orleans branch mints and private minters Templeton Reid and the Bechtlers. If you do a presentation at a gathering or

other venue, consider compiling your notes into an article. Do not worry about the grammar. The editor will do the rest. Electronic manuscripts should be submitted by email to contactus@southerngoldsociety.org.

Mission Statement

The Southern Gold Society was formed to increase the enjoyment and study of Southern gold coins and related history, through an informal, relaxed mix of education and fellowship. The society is reminiscent of those of a bygone era, in which connoisseurship and a gentlemanly appreciation of Southern gold coins is the order of the day.

Purpose

- To facilitate the enjoyment and study of the gold coins and related history of the Southern branch mints (Dahlonega, Charlotte, and New Orleans) and private Southern minters (Templeton Reid and the Bechtlers).
- To enjoy each member's knowledge and friendship in an informal manner.
- To provide a relaxed, pleasant environment in which to meet during selected coin shows and other convenient events.
- To encourage the appreciation and preservation of a Southern gold coin’s original surfaces.
- To consolidate the information, resources, and talent available to enthusiasts of these historic Southern gold coins.

Annual Membership Fees

Regular $25 (January-December).

Membership for new members joining in October, November, or December extends through the next year. Checks for membership fees should be made payable to the Southern Gold Society and mailed to David Crenshaw, P.O. Box 237, Dacula, GA 30019-0004.

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